Sabbatai Zevi: The Erased Messiah

By Matthew Lincoln

Today many people outside of academia never hear the name of Sabbatai Zevi. If you were to ask a person on the streets if this name meant anything they would most likely say no. Yet, Sabbatai Zevi was the center of the biggest messianic movement in Jewish history. He was a strange figure that suffered from "manic-depressive psychosis" (Scholem 1973, 126). He was not a robust figure that sought the attention he gained nor was he a natural leader. He was often crippled by his feelings of "being persecuted from without...even from within" (Scholem 1973, 126). So how did he become the central figure of such a movement?

On August 1, 1626, in Turkey, Sabbatai Zevi was born on the anniversary of the "destruction of the Temple" (Eisen, p.4). That day is significant because not only does it mark a major loss for the Jewish people when the Romans destroyed the center of their religious identity but, it also marked the "birthday of the Messiah" (Eisen p. 4). He was named Sabbatai because he was born on the Sabbath day. Thus, making him a perfect contender to claim messiahship. After his birth, two more children would be born, his brothers "Joseph and Elias" (Schnur 2010, 162).

During Sabbatai's, young life rumors abound about the appearance of the Lost Tribes of Israel and the nearing coming of the messiah. Many Jews and Christians believed that the appearance of these tribes would "precede the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth" (Schnur 2010, 164). Rumors spread that people on the Scottish coast saw a ship "flying the flag of David" (Schnur 2010, 164). People claimed that the flag had Hebrew lettering. Other rumors began to pour forth from Arabia that an ancient army had appeared "bearing the standard of Israel" (Schnur 2010, 164). These rumors barely abated and were attested to from believers of all three monotheistic faiths of Abraham.

Sabbatai displayed his intelligence early in life. By the time he was twenty he was already "an accomplished Talmud and Kabbalistic scholar" (Eisen, p.4). Many learned men would visit him and talk to him about the differing aspects of theology. They found his insights to be of great importance, for he was able to make a connection that had alluded the most astute among them. His intelligence was increased by his natural "beauty and charm" (Schnur 2010, 165). Both men and women were fascinated by his wisdom and character. He was considered an equal among the most educated people in his area.

Though many people adored the young Sabbatai, some were leary of him. One of his school teachers Isacc di Alba noticed that he exhibited "strange and immoral behavior" (Scholem 1973, 111). He gave no further evidence for his conclusion except that Sabbatai was so different from other children that he stood out. Sabbatai's lack of interest in games, girls, and other people worried Isaac. He felt that Sabbatai was too disconnected from the everyday world that people live in.

In 1641 Sabbatai finished his schooling and "lived a life of abstinence and solitude" (Scholem 1973, 112). From sun up until the late hours of the night, Sabbatai studied the Tanakh, Talmud, and kabbalah constantly. He did nothing else except study, he did not work nor, did he leave his house except to bathe in the ocean and go into open fields and chant the names of God.

Based on his devotion and knowledge, he received the title *Hakim* which is a "Sephardic honorific for a rabbi" (Scholem 1973, 111). After receiving his title he continued to live the life of piety. People's admiration for him did not waver and many people would go to him for advice in both religious and secular matters.

It was also around this time that Sabbatai began to have strange sexual nightmares. These nightmares were so vivid that he was afraid to sleep at night and upon awakening and pray for God's protection. He believed that he was being attacked by demons and he sought ways to rid himself of these unholy abominations. He believed the answers he sought

were in the Zohar and the Qanah, two mystical treatises. The Qanah was considered a dangerous book as it criticizes the methods of Halakhah as well as a literalist approach to Judaism. Those that knew him warned him to tread lightly when reading such materials. It is unclear how much weight he gave their opinion. After months of intense study, he concluded that the mystical interpretation of the Torah and the Talmud was the only interpretation that should be accepted.

He then started to fast frequently and beat his own body with cords as part of his daily routine. When reading the Hebrew Scriptures he departed from normal kabbalistic practice. Instead of meditating on verses of the scriptures, he would analyze every word. Every letter became a key to a deeper mystery through its use and placement within the words itself. Unlike other Kabbalists that believed God was unattainable except through study, Sabbatai began to see things differently. Sabbatai began to talk of God as being exceedingly close. Sabbatai saw God and that which emanated from God as the same. In a certain sense, Sabbati concluded that God not only transcended all material reality but also was material reality.

He was noticed by young students as being the most insightful person they knew and a following started to surround him. He would with his proteges wake early every morning to bathe in the ocean. They would then sing, dance, and eat-in open fields, and then study the Torah, Talmud, and Kabbalistic writings until the late hours of the night.

During the year 1648, Sabbatai started to behave differently. He started to push his students away from him and isolate himself more and more. He started to have long periods of depression. His students were not dismayed by his actions, they concluded that they must have some deeper meaning. Even other rabbis and the townspeople were not alarmed by his sudden change of behavior. Also, during this year, people started to say that they saw Sabbatai doing miracles. The most-reported miracle that people claimed to have seen was Sabbatai levitating.

People also noticed that his body changed as well during the year. His face at times shone as bright as the sun. His body would emit sweet smells reminiscent of perfume. His followers began

to ask him if he was indeed the messiah. Sabbatai would push the question aside leaving it unanswered. Instead of detouring his disciples, they began to see him in a messianic light. They believed they were the chosen generation to see the Kingdom of God established on earth.

This small group of Sabbatai's students was not the only one expecting the messiah. Many Christians and Jews calculated that the messiah would be within their lifetimes. They saw the persecution of the Jews throughout Europe as a divine sign. They speculated when the messiah would appear and believed that he was already on earth living unnoticed by the populace.

Sabbatai did make one claim that may give an indication that he was seeing himself in a messianic light. One day while teaching his students he spoke of Psalm 110 "Thou art a priest forever, after the manner of Melchizedek" (Schnur 2010, 176). He told his followers that the passage contained his initials and his character was summed up in that verse.

As the year progressed Sabbatai started to have more “irrational moments” (Eisen, p.4). He was seen as “violating Jewish law” (Eisen ,p.4) by eating non kosher foods. He proclaimed to his students that his “sins were righteous deeds” Eisen, p.4). He was even heard to “pronounce the name of God” (Eisen, p.5). These actions confused his followers and those that admired him. When his students confronted him about these strange behaviors he acted as if he didn’t understand what they were saying. He then sought solitude by locking himself away in his room. His students started to look for clues about the nature of the messiah and if the messiah could abrogate the Torah.

On June 15 while Sabbatai was in deep prayer and contemplation he felt a presence. He did not move but from this presence a wondrous voice spoke forth telling him that he was God's redeemer. He then saw the Patriarchs appear around him singing praises to him while they anointed him. When the vision subsided he concluded that he heard the voice of God. This vision he kept to himself for a while only telling a few close friends.

On December 4th Sabbatai was taking a bath in the nearby sea, a whirlpool appeared and swallowed Sabbati. Somehow Sabbatai was able to escape the whirlpool and make it safely to shore. His friend Abraham Brazillay watched this event unfold. He believed that God had saved his eccentric friend. Abraham would tell people that this event represented the "messiah's soul from the depth of the abyss" (Scholem 1973, 145). Abraham became a believer in the messiahship of Sabbatai and after telling Sabbatai's students instituted this day as a fast day. From that moment on they called this day Purim for deliverance was near.

Sabbatai and his followers were quiet for the next few years. They continued their Kabbalistic studies and meditations. The shocking actions of Sabbatai had not returned. He was in good standing with his community. His followers studied his every move but Sabbatai made no messianic claims nor did he perform any more miracles.

At some point in 1652, Sabbatai went to the weekly sabbath service. While he was attending he was asked to give the weekly reading from the Torah. Sabbatai went up to the pew and began to recite the passage. When reading the passage Sabbatai pronounced the name of God everytime it appeared. This behavior shocked those in attendance except for his disciples. His disciples saw this as confirmation that he was indeed the messiah. The other congregants stood up and started to yell at Sabbatai. He continued reading as if he did not hear them. His followers then stood up and started chanting ""Long live our King and Messiah, Sabbatai Zevi!" (Schnur 2010, 178). Sabbatai finished his reading as soon as he looked out at the crowd yelling he said nothing. Violence then broke out between the congregants. Some of the people tried to hurt Sabbatai while his followers tried to protect him. The rabbi had to intervene and escort Sabbatai out of the Temple.

Within the week the head rabbi called for Sabbatai to appear before him. When Sabbatai was in his presence the rabbi began to question Sabbatai on the meaning of pronouncing God's name. The heard rabbi wanted Sabbatai to admit that constant study of the kabbalah had "unbalanced him and rendered him irresponsible" (Schnur 2010, 179). Sabbatai stood quiet for a long time before the rabbi, standing still. After a while Sabbatai said to the rabbi: "You and

your like have always failed to recognize, and misunderstood, the true prophets of God. Would you treat me as you treated the Nazarene?" (Schnur 2010, 179).The rabbi was absolutely shocked by what he heard. In anger he commanded Sabbatai to never return to his synagogue again.

Sabbatai then moved to Greece for a while were he spent the next few years in respectability. He was well received by the Jewish community, they were impressed by knowledge and his insights into the mysteries of scripture. He never acted as a rabbi but was looked at as a rabbi. People would go to him to ask him questions about God, scripture, whether or not they should marry, and other questions that pertain to daily life. He lived off of the gifts that people brought him. He was known to be kind, charitable, and good looking. As it was in his hometown women thought he was a beautiful man.

In 1654 Sabbatai and his followers made their way to Smyrna, where they stayed for a short time. It was at Smyrna where Sabbatai displayed his strange behaviors again. He celebrated ". Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot all in one week" (Eisen, p.5). He then invented new blessings, these blessings praised God for allowing him and his followers to eat that which was forbidden. He then had a wedding where he "married a Torah scroll" (Eisen, p. 5). The inhabitants of this town were horrified and drove him and his followers out of town.

Sabbatai then made his way to Jerusalem where many people were attracted to him. His behavior had returned to normal. He quickly became known for his wisdom and insight. Before long he was a prominent figure in Jerusalem and was respected by all that knew him.

While he was in Jerusalem a woman named Sarah was making her way towards the holy land. She was a Jewish woman that had been orphaned at a young age. She was raised by Christians who tried to force her into the nunnery. She escaped this fate by running away. At some point she heard a voice telling her that she would be the bride of the messiah. Known for her beauty many men wanted to marry her but she refused them. Instead she would prostitute herself to her admirers. The men were willing to pay whatever price she asked because she was known for her "unbridled sensuality" (Schnur 2010,182).

Another charismatic figure was also making a name for himself. He would become known as Nathan of Gaza. As a young man he had deep insights into the scriptures and was prone to visions. He was even seen talking to angels by some of his peers. Nathan was able to weave seemingly unrelated passages from different Jewish sources and have a coherent theory of how they were related. Many people were highly impressed by Nathan's knowledge and eventfulness. Many people, including highly educated people, called this young man Master.

Nathan spent his days studying the kabbalah and in doing so had a vision. In this vision it became clear to him that he was the reborn Elijah the prophet. He would herald the coming of the messiah who would bring God's glory to earth. After this vision he would teach that the messiah was hidden among the people of Jerusalem. Those Jews that had suffered persecution in Palestine listened intently to Nathan “absorbing the dew of hope” (Schnur 2010, 183).

In 1658 Sabbatai went to Constantinople where he quickly became a fixture. His knowledge spread throughout Constantinople and when he was at the Temple people would gather around to listen to him.On several occasions he led the service by giving sermons. His insights into Jewish law and how to implement it in daily life gave many Jews a sense of purpose and hope.

It must be remembered that Sabbatai was still in a world of apocalyptic fever. Atrocities were happening to the Jewish people in Russia, Poland, Palestine, and many other places. It appeared that the end of the world was near. Christians and Muslims also commented on how corrupt the world had become and that they too believed that something was about to happen. God was going to reveal himself with their lifetimes.

Both Christians and Muslims started to look deeper into the Jewish religion for more clues about the coming age. Both of the aforementioned groups started to read the Torah and study the Kabbalah. At some point the year 1666 was designated as the time when the messiah would make himself known. It has never been fully explained as to why. Christains made connections to the book of revelations since 666 was the number of the beast. Though the

Jewish and Islamic calendar give different years than the European model they too settled on that particular year. It seems as if men were trying to push God by their own wills.

Two prominent members of the Jewish community Samuel Primo and Abraham Iachini heard about Sabbati's great wisdom and saintly character. They met Sabbatai, spoke with him for many days and shortly after their meeting started to produce documents stating that Sabbatai was indeed the messiah. Many other prominent men within the Jewish community began to flock to Sabbatai. Crowds started to surround him wherever he went in Constantinople. Children would flock to him as well, he then started to give them candy while he recited psalms to them.

At one point he went through the city carrying a fish. When his followers asked him why he was doing this he explained that “Israel’s redemption would come under this zodiac sign” (Schnur 2010, 185). The leading rabbis were outraged when they heard this. The fish was a well known symbol of Christianity and they were appalled that any Jewish person could make such a statement. The rabbis and others that did not see him in a messianic light began to harass him daily. He would leave after residing eight more months in Constantinople. Many have suggested that he left because of the rabbis harassing him but that doesn’t seem to be the case. According to the sources Sabatai left after hearing about Nathan of Gaza, the self proclaimed Elijah. Sabbatai went looking for confirmation about his messiahship.

When Sabbatai returned to Jerusalem he visited the wailing wall. While he prayed the voices of the patriarchs could be heard, Sabbatai fainted while people watched him. His followers were more convinced now that truly this man must be the messiah.

Nathan as previously mentioned was a highly learned individual. He was also known to be gifted in other areas as well such as “ clairvoyance, combined with the lofty languages of the Prophets, made him feared and respected throughout the Holy Land” (Schnur 2010, 185). He was also the “foremost disciple” (Scholem 1973, 201) of Rabbi Moses Hagiz, one of the prominent Kabbalistic scholars of his time.

Nathan, like Sabbatai did not work a regular job.Instead he married a woman who came

from wealth. His father-in-law supported him and his wife because though his daughter was said to be beautiful she had one defect. It doesn't make it clear exactly what that defect was except it involved one of her eyes. It is possible that she had a lazy eye, in any case her father felt guilty that a learned man should marry a defective woman so he supported Nathan's Studies. Nathan studied from early morning hours to late into the night.

Sabbatai was still in Jerusalem in 1665 living a quiet life. He believed that he was possessed by demons so he stayed away from most people. He spent his days chanting and performing exorcisms on himself. His followers started to weave together their own theories about Sabbatai going into the depths of darkness to battle evil.

Between March and February Nathan of Gaza started to study the works of Eliezer Azikiri, an eccentric Kabbalist that sought revelations in dreams.While using one of Azikir's methods Nathan had a vision of his own soul reincarnating again and again in different times and places to the beginning of humanity. He was then visited by Angels that "revealed to me many of the mysteries of the Torah" (Scholem 1973, 204). He "saw a vision of God all day long and all night" (Dcholem 1973, 204). The angels then told him that the messiah's name was Sabbatai Sevi. He then took to fasting and chanting daily in a locked room. He concluded that the vision he experienced made him a prophet of God. He was now fully prepared to pave the way for the coming messiah.

Shortly, Nathan had another vision where he saw the merkabah as described in the book of Ezekiel. Inscribed on the wheel was the name Sabbatai Sevi, he then heard the voice of God saying: "Thus saith the Lord, behold your savior cometh, Sabbatai Zevi is his name" (Scholem 1973, 206).Then the angels of the covenant stood before him and said: "Israel ought to believe in the messiah without any sign or miracle". (Scholem 1973, 211). They also told him that those who wanted a sign were demons disguised as humans. At this moment Nathan was not only the new John the Baptist but was also the new Paul of Tarsus as he would not only pave the way for the messiah but he would also expand on the teachings of the messiah.

Nathan then began to tirelessly preach the good news of Sabbatai Sevi, the messiah, the redeemer, the God of Israel. Nathan started to write theological essays that unknown to him

were articulating the very idea that Sabbatai was hinting at but failed to place into words.

It has been said that Nathan is the first “great theologian of heretical kabbalism” (Scholem 1973, 208). There is no doubt that without Nathan the Sabbatai movement would not have been able to spread as far as it did. Though Sabbatai attracted some followers it would be Nathan that turned it into a fledgling movement that would threaten the foundations of not just Judaism but Christianity and Islam as well.

Nathan was also fond of the writings of Abraham Abulafia and Joseph ibn Sayyah, two lesser known kabbalists that had ideas about the letters in the Torah. According to their teachings you could take different Hebrew letters and meditate on them in various combinations. In doing so different attributes of God would be revealed. Nathan would use this method of meditating not only on God but also on Sabbatai Sevi, his elected.

It is unclear if Christianity played a part in the worldview of Nathan of Gaza. Some have tried to make that connection based on some of his teachings but no evidence has surfaced of him reading the New Testament or even speaking to Christians. Nathan was prejudiced against Christianity and any connection or overlap may be accidental. In studying mysticism many conclusions may be similar but that is no proof of endorsement.

Sabbatai and Nathan formally met in Spring. They spent many weeks together discussing God, scripture and the perplexing personality of Sabbatai. Nathan listened to Sabbatai as Sabbatai went into details about his moments of exaltation and his deep moments of darkness. Sabbatai also told Nathan about the parallels that existed between himself and Jesus the Christian messiah. Nothing Sabbatai spoke alarmed Nathan. Instead Nathan saw it as part of God's divine plan and assured Sabbatai that he was indeed the messiah.

During the Month of May during Pentecost Sabbatai fell into a deep depression. He refused to allow people to see him, He locked himself in his room with his curtains drawn. He even refused to go to the synagogue for its Sabbath meetings. Nathan was speaking to Sabbatai through his door, going to the synagogue and giving hope to the Sabbatai community. At some point during the month while Nathan was attending temple service he fainted. While

unconscious he was heard muttering about repentance. Those that witnessed this event said that the voice that came from Nathan was not his own. It was a much deeper and more regal sounding. When Nathan regained consciousness the congregants asked him what was the meaning of his murmuring. He looked at the congregants and exclaimed that Sabbatai Sevi was

the messiah, the true King of Israel. He then quickly left the Temple and went to Sabbatai Sevi.After hearing Nathan tell of what happened Sabbatai accepted his fate as messiah. May 31 Sabbatai left his room and proclaimed himself to his followers that he was indeed the messiah.His followers celebrated and made that day a holy day. Later that day Sabbatai spoke to Nathan about his “right to transgress the law” (Scholem 1973, 223). He explained to Nathan that when he is in his ecstatic state he is in “a different dispensation” (Scholem 1973, 223). He then explained his rudimentary idea of his conception of the Mystery of the Godhead and what he meant by the God of his faith. These ideas were not new but few people were able to get Sabbatai to delve deep into his own notions of divinity. He also explained to Nathan that the mix multitudes spoken of in scripture were the political leaders of the world. The sons of Lilith spoken of in mystical writings were the rich people of the world who were not politicians but were still evil because they prized financial gain over God. The children of Satan, a phrase Sabbatai used often he explained, were the Jewish leaders that rejected the messiah.

A few days later Sabbatai had rings made for each one of his fingers. On each finger was a name of God. He believed that he was the embodiment of the divine names of the Most High. He came to this conclusion by using a method called *gematria.* This method consists of each letter representing a number, you add the numbers together to find that total.Then you look for other words or phrases that equal the same number. Each word or phrase with the same number means something in relation to one another. Sabbatai discovered that his name and the word Shadday which is a name for God were the same numerical value. This attribute to God which means the Almighty was the God of his faith. Sabbatai would tell his followers that there was no distinction between himself and the Almighty. In a sense Sabbatai and God were one. Soon after he told his followers that he and God were one he started to sign his letters as the

"first born" (Scholem 1973, 235) as well as "I am the Lord your God Sabbatai Sevi" (Scholem 1973, 235). He also added the crooked serpent to his name. The crooked serpent is a symbol of moses in the wilderness.

Many writers that come across the above statement automatically assume that Sabbatai was influenced by Christian thought. There is no basis for this besides that Sabbatai knew something about Jesus. Sabbatai never suggests that he knew Christian dogma nor did he implement Christian ideas into his movement. If anything, it shows how a person that goes too deep into the mystical realms can come to very strange conclusions. Maybe Jesus was such a person that went too far into his mystical apocalyptic vision. Maybe Jesus was telling things to his inner circle that many of his followers did not know but was planning on telling people before he was found guilty of treason by the Romans. Parallels may exist but that doesn't mean Sabbatai was familiar with Christianity on any deep level. Sabbatai, like Nathan, may have had a superficial understanding of Christianity and that's as far as it went.

In July Sabbatai returned to Jerusalem with a throne of followers proclaiming him to be the messiah, the King of Israel. The Jewish authorities investigated and watched Sabbatai careful. When Sabbatai tried to offer a sacrifice at the ruins of the second Temple the authorities stopped him. They argued that he had no right to carry out such a sacrifice because he was not of the priestly classed. Sabbatai did as they asked and left the scene.

Sabbatai then rode through the streets of Jerusalem on horseback in regal dress. The rabbis within Jerusalem were torn over Sabbatai. Some of them knew him as a pious man worthy of being the messiah while others saw him as a dangerous heretic.Those that disliked Sabbatai formally excommunicated him and banned him from the city. Sabbati stayed the rest of July and went to Gaza in early June.

When Sabbatai and his followers were in Gaza Sabbatai changed the midnight devotions that were "instituted by the Safed Kabbalists" (Scholem 1973, 250). These late hour devotionals were of a solemn nature pining for the presence of God to come upon the earth. Sabbatai changed them to joyous devotionals filled with celebration because he was with them.

He represented God's presence on earth. Nathan, inspired by Sabbatai wrote homilies and treatises that he dispersed among the faithful. The faithful would copy and carry these new writings to other Sabbatai communities that were propping up in Egypt, Europe, Turkey, and Palestine.

On August 12 Sabbatai went to Smyrna and remained quiet. Nathan was busy writing to the converts to this new faith. With every letter, every homily, he was forever expanding his kabbalistic theology. He even changed the traditional prayers to protect the leader of the realm to be: “now for the king of Israel, the sultan Sabbatai Sevi” (Scholem 1973, 262). He also gave Sabbatai a new name Amirah which means “Our Lord and King, his majesty to be exalted” (Scholem 1973, 263)

On September 19, the Day of Atonement, as many as twenty men and four women started to prophesy that Sabbatai was the messiah. They claimed that Elijah had shown himself to Sabbatai Sevi. Two of these men were rabbis, they not only proclaimed the aforementioned but also spoke of Sabbatai Sevi as being the living embodiment of Shadday. This scene shocked those that witnessed and later heard of the happening.

An old man appeared washing peoples hands and feets saying that was the prophet Zechariah. He was forgiving the sins of people that got their feet washed. He told them that the Kingdom of God would be on earth soon and that Sabbatai Sevi would lead a holy army against the enemies of God. Other people started to talk about the destruction of Churches and Mosques. Some even tried to convert Christians and Muslims to the faith of Sabbatai Sevi.

Nathan began to hear heavenly voices and see angels swirling around him. The voices and angels would speak in musical tones. They proclaimed that Sabbatai Sevi was the Son of David and he would usher in the messianic age within the year.

Within the first two weeks of October Nathan issued letters to the followers of Sabbatai that they were in a year of Jubilation. They were required to meditate on the *Shema*, a prayer that Jewish people say every morning.While meditating on each aspect of the prayer they should see how Sabbatai Sevi is the living embodiment of the entire prayer. They should

continue their Sabbath devotions and guard themselves against evil. Especially those that wanted to see miracles.

Sabbatai then started to speak of salvation especially to those who did not believe in his messiahship. He told them that all people would eventually achieve salvation but the unbelievers would go through a series of punishments before they could be purified to enter paradise. He did this by using Jesus as an example. In Jewish tradition Jesus is condemned to eternal torture but Sabbatai did not agree. He told his followers “if Jesus was capable of Salvation, then there was hope for the unbelievers” (Scholem 1973, 286). Nathan did not believe that any Jewish person would not eventually enter God's kingdom.

One of the contested aspects of this portion of the Sabbatai saga is when exactly Sabbatai married Sara. According to some historians it was 1664 while others maintain it was in 1665. Even his followers celebrate this day differently and at different times of the year. It is known that Nathan opposed the marriage due to Sara’s ill repute. Nathan seems to be a lone voice whereas Sabbatai and many others see this as part of God's divine plan. Sabbatai was to redeem Sara as a representation of his ability to grant salvation to Israel. It is known that Nathan dubbed her “Lady Queen Rebekah” (Scholem 1973, 193).

Shortly after the wedding his followers started to send letters to the heads of powerful countries such as Germany, Morocco, Italy, and many others. Each letter declared that the Sabbatai Sevi was the messiah and that the hour of God’s kingdom is near. If they want to be saved they need to get right with God and accept his anointment. Not surprisingly none of the leaders took it seriously. The Jewish community on the other hand was starting to be divided.

Many Jews in Europe and North Africa started to prepare for the day of reckoning.

Again, the Lost Tribes of Israel started to be reported. People were claiming that they were marching across Arabia. It was reported that they were even appearing in parts of Morocco as well. These men were armed with “bows, arrows, and lances” (Scholem 1973, 340). They were led by a Captain that had the ability to perform miracles. These reports gave the Sabbati believers high expectations. The Sabbatai followers held vivid depictions that Sabbatai

would greet the army, take command, and then march into battle with them. These expectations were in direct contrast to what Sabbatai and Nathan came to understand and preach. According to them it was going to be the “singing of hymns” (Scholem 1973, 350) that would bring redemption.

After their wedding night Sara became an evangelist for her husband's cause. Her style of dress and the way she wore her hair were copied by women both in the movement and outside it. Her beauty was admired by all who met her. She was able to convince large groups of people that her husband was indeed the messiah. She and Nathan were a dual force, enlarging the movement to numbers never seen before in Jewish history.

Nathan started to have seizures, these seizures brought him visions, inspired him to write what he saw and send them to the believing masses. In Amsterdam special prayer books were being printed that showed Sabbatai on a throne in glory. He was surrounded by angels that placed “the radiant crown of glory over his head” (Schnur 2010, 193).

1666 started off with high expectations. This was the year when history was to come to an abrupt end and the thousand year reign of the messiah was to begin. It was also the year that Turkish authorities started to take notice of this fledgling Jewish movement. They sent spies to watch Nathan and Sabbatai. They were to report what they did, what they said, and what they intended to do. After a month of reconnaissance the spies reported back to what they saw and heard. The Sultan was given a full report and was alarmed at the idea that they could mount an army and pose a serious threat.

In February they arrested Sabbatai Sevi under the guise of questioning him. While speaking to him they saw the fragile person that he was and threatened to kill him if he did not take Islam as his religion and stop his radical preaching. Sabbatai buckled and publicly renounced Judaism and accepted Islam. He was given the name of “Aziz Mehemed Effendi”(Eisen, p.8). This sent shockwaves throughout the Jewish community.Many of his followers were distraught but Nathan wrote quickly to the believers that Sabbatai’s conversion was part of God’s plan. In order for Sabbatai to convert the gentiles he must put on their faith.

It is interesting to note that Sabbatai was placed under house arrest. He was supposed to be Muslim and no longer allowed to teach his faith. Yet, reports show that Sabbatai continued to meet with Nathan and his other followers on a daily basis. He still attended a synagogue in Constantinople and continued to have moments of exaltation.In his moments of exaltation Sabbatai tried to convince his followers to become Muslim. Nathan told his followers to be aware of Sabbatai's odd saying and to not convert to Islam.

The years passed but Nathan and his followers kept the flame alive. Nathan continued to write and rewrite treatise after treatise about the meaning of Sabbatai Sevi's adoption of Islam. In 1673 Sabbatai was sent to Albania and given a modest home to live in. He was technically still under house arrest but was allowed to go to the river near his residence to bathe. His followers continued to visit him and he continued to teach them about God and the Hebrew scriptures. His wife Sara followed him to live with him in exile. Sabbatai would take two more wives both were Jewish women that he had converted to Islam.

On the Day of Atonement,1673 Sabbata Sevi died. Tradition within the Sabbatai community say he during *ne'ilah* the "prayer that closes the service" (Freely 2003, 205). According to legend that is when Moses died as well. The news of his death crept out slowly to the other Sabbatai communities. It would be almost a year later when his followers in Italy found out about Sabbatai's death. Many people wanted to visit the grave of their messiah but soon a new theological development happened. Taking a page from Islam where the Mahdi is in occultation, Sabbatai's followers started to preach that Sabbatai was in occultation. That is alive yet hidden from the public. The promises that were prophesied would come to pass when "at the appointed time he would return in all his glory for the final redemption" (Freely 2003, 207). They started to find psalms about David in a cave waiting for his moment to be called to action. These psalms were taken to be about Sabbatai and how he is waiting for God's call before he could bring salvation.

Sara, along with the other wives of Sabbatai Sevi fade out of the story and it is unknown how they spent the rest of their lives. The believers of Sabbatai had speculation and rumors but

any concrete proof alludes to the document seekers. His children that he fathered with his wives would go on to become prominent members of the society. It appears they distanced themselves from his legacy.

Nathan did his best to keep the flames of the movement together. He continued to make innovations and commanded the faithful to meditate on Sabbatai Sevi during their daily lives. By meditating on Sabbatai all inner knowledge would be revealed to that individual. Nathan would die in Macedonia in 1680, he was buried in Jewish cemetery where Sabbatai's faithful would make annual pilgrimages.

The Sabbatai movement did not die out. Some people went back to Judaism, others converted to Islam while some remained Jewish on the outside but secretly practiced the teachings of Sabbatai Sevi. Others are more open about their beliefs in the messiahship of their Beloved as they refer to Sabbatai. The most notable community is the Donme community in Turkey. There was also the Kapandsis, Konyosos, and the Karkash. Later the Frankist movement would happen. Even today there are communities that still revere Sabbatai Sevi as the messiah. It appears that Jesus and Sabbatai Sevi had one thing in common, they both started movements that would grow and outlive them way beyond their exit of mortality.

Bibliography

Eisen, Yosef. "Shabbatai Zevi: the Messianic Imposter." chabad.org. Chabad-Lubivitch Media Center. Accessed October 13, 2020. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4379679/jewish/Shabbatai-Zevi-the-Messianic-Imposter.htm

Freely, John. *The Lost Messiah: In Search of the Mystical Rabbi Sabbatai Sevi.* Woodstock,NY: The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers,Inc, 2003.

Schnur, Harry C. *Sabbatai Zevi: The Cabalistic Messiah.* Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010.

Scholem, Gershom. *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973.